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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 3048  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 9185  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 6671  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY PRIORITY 1862  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO PRIORITY 0881  
RUEHMR/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE PRIORITY 1724  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000176

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS FOR DUMMIES

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Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The deadline for submitting candidate dossiers to the Constitutional Council will pass on February 23 at midnight, marking the first bureaucratic hurdle for presidential hopefuls who want to be included on the April 9 ballot. To qualify, potential candidates must meet basic citizenship and age requirements and collect at least 75,000 signatures from ordinary citizens, or at least 600 signatures from popularly elected officials. The Constitutional Council will review each dossier and announce the official candidates for the presidential election within the next two weeks. In the meantime, the National Election Commission (NEC) established by presidential decree on January 4 is laying the groundwork for election day, updating voter registries and lining up the resources needed to manage some 50,000 polling stations that will welcome voters on April 9. A mid-level contact at the Ministry of Interior (MOI) told us that although several ministries are represented in the NEC, which is chaired by Prime Minister Ouyahia, the MOI manages the day-to-day oversight of the election process. While Algeria's electoral system appears to have the checks and balances needed to ensure fairness, the MOI and the Constitutional Council -- institutions deeply loyal to Bouteflika -- have considerable influence over the election process. The result is a system that strongly favors Bouteflika, even without considering the formidable media and campaign resources the president displayed during his February 12 campaign announcement. END SUMMARY.

GETTING ON THE BALLOT...AND THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL  
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12. (C) Algerian presidential hopefuls will reach their first milestone on February 23, the deadline for submitting candidate dossiers to Algeria's Constitutional Council (CC). For the 28 rumored potential candidates, it is the first major obstacle in Algeria's heavily bureaucratic election process. In addition to citizenship and age requirements, would-be candidates must collect a minimum of 75,000 signatures from ordinary citizens across 25 separate wilayas (provinces), or obtain 600 signatures from members of a popularly elected bodies, such as local assemblies. Candidates must submit each signature using an original form provided by the Ministry of Interior and have each signature form validated by a local or provincial assembly official who verifies that the individual on the form is a registered voter. By February 23 at midnight, candidates must submit their dossiers to the CC, including all signature documents, a declaration of income and personal assets, and evidence that the candidate has printed his or her income declaration

in at least two newspapers. Our mid-level contact at the Ministry of Interior told us that the CC will review "each signature" and declare the official list of candidates soon after the February 23 deadline.

13. (C) Once the CC announces the list of qualified candidates, campaign activities can begin. Our ministry source said candidates generally have one month to campaign and that all campaign activities must cease two days before election day. Candidates may produce their own campaign materials, using French, Arabic or Berber, as long as the materials contain no racially offensive content or messages that "undermine national unity." The law prohibits candidates from posting campaign materials in government buildings, mosques, schools or public training centers. The authorities will designate some public areas where candidates are allowed to post campaign advertisements. The Ministry of Communication is responsible for establishing guidelines for equal media access. In past elections each candidate received an allotment of time to run campaign messages aired during a 30-minute time slot that precedes the midday and evening state news broadcasts.

14. (C) Campaign finance rules allow candidates to spend 15 million dinars (USD 211,000) on campaign activities in the first round of voting, and as much as 20 million dinars (USD 282,000) if a second vote round occurs. Private individuals may donate up to 200,000 dinars (USD 2,800) to a campaign directly, or through a political party. Campaigns are also permitted to accept in-kind donations. In each case, the campaign is responsible for keeping records of all cash and in-kind contributions. At the end of the campaign, candidates must submit a report of their campaign finance activities to the CC, which verifies the campaign's

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compliance. For its part, the government will reimburse candidates 10 percent of their actual campaign expenses. Candidates who poll between 10 and 20 percent of the vote receive a 20-percent reimbursement; those who poll more than 30 percent are reimbursed at 30 percent of actual expenses. Our interior ministry contact admitted that in-kind contributions are often used to subvert campaign finance rules and that expense records are often incomplete.

#### ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

15. (C) In accordance with a January 4 presidential decree, Prime Minister Ouyahia has established a National Election Commission (NEC) responsible for the administration of the April 9 elections. The NEC includes five subcommittees and one special finance committee chaired by the Ministry of Finance. The subcommittees share responsibility for the preparation and organization of the election, the validation and control of election materials, security at polling stations, invitations to election observers and media promotion. On paper the NEC is chaired by the prime minister, who divides responsibilities among the relevant ministries appointed to the NEC. However, our interior ministry contact confirmed that in reality her ministry manages the day-to-day oversight of the election process.

16. (C) The NEC oversees the compilation of voter registration lists and the management of some 50,000 polling stations through a network of provincial election commissions (PECs), at the wilaya (province) level, and local election commissions (LECs) at the baladiya (local) level. A former polling station official said PEC and LEC membership is drawn from wilaya and baladiya government officials. On election day, the LECs validate the voter lists and vote protocols that they receive from the polling stations in their district, which are then passed to the relevant PEC. PECs compile the results from subordinate LECs and transmit the election materials to the NEC for final tabulation. After the NEC completes the vote tabulation, the Constitutional

Council must validate the official election result.

17. (C) Traditionally, polling stations are located in selected schools throughout Algeria. Our interior ministry contact told us that MOI officials will work with school principals to select a list of teachers to work in polling stations on election day. She added that each teacher is paid a stipend of 3,000 dinars (USD 40) for his/her service, "plus they get a free meal." Algerians vote in polling stations according to their place of residence. There are 18 million Algerians who will be eligible to vote on April 9. To register, an Algerian must obtain a voter registration card by providing proof of residence and a form of government identification to their local municipal authority. Algerians have until April 5 to register to vote. Algerians living overseas have until March 30 to register to vote through their nearest embassy.

POLLING DAY  
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18. (C) On the eve of election day, LECs deliver voter lists to polling stations in sealed envelopes; police deliver ballot urns, blank ballots, seals and other materials. On election day, polling station staff arrive at 7:30am to inspect the premises and acknowledge receipt of voting materials. Authorized elections observers are permitted to arrive at the same time as staff. Each staff member signs the vote protocol and the seal is affixed to the ballot urn just before the polls open at 8:00am. To vote, an individual must present a form of government identification and must be listed on the voter registry at the polling station where he or she intends to vote. There is no system for absentee voting, but Algerians living overseas can register and vote at Algerian embassies and consulates. After the polls close at 8:00pm, the polling station staff conduct a manual vote count and enter the result and any observed irregularities into the vote protocol. The used ballots are returned to the ballot urns, resealed and transported by the police to the relevant LEC for review.

COMMENT: THE FIX IS IN  
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19. (C) On the surface the election rules and institutions

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appear to have the checks and balances needed to guarantee a fair and transparent election. But the reality is that the process will be tightly controlled by two government institutions deeply loyal to Bouteflika: the Ministry of Interior and the Constitutional Council. Led by Bouteflika's close ally Nourredine Zerhouni, the MOI is in a position to hand-pick those trusted to oversee the election process at every administrative level from the NEC down to the polling stations. The MOI also has control over the custody and transfer of voting materials and the management of voter registries. For its part, the Constitutional Council, which quickly and quietly accepted the November constitutional revision that allowed Bouteflika to run for reelection, will determine who gets on the ballot and will have the final say in declaring the official election outcome. The result is a system that strongly favors Bouteflika, even without considering the formidable media and campaign resources that were on display during his February 12 announcement rally. We expect the field of official candidates will likely be narrowed down to five or six competitors after the CC completes its review. With the fix in, the big question -- and the regime's big concern -- remains to what extent the government can convince Algerians to turn out on April 9 and vote.  
PEARCE